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## FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH IN SANTA ROSA COUNTY ENCOURAGES RESIDENTS TO TAKE STEPS TO PREVENT MOSQUITO-BORNE AND TICK-BORNE DISEASES

*Fight the Bite and Kick the Tick*



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**Milton, Fla.**— It's fun to be outside during the late spring and early summer, especially in the cool of the evening, but there are often a few things that can run you back inside. They are called mosquitos! The Santa Rosa County Health Department's Community Health division wants to enlist you in a public awareness campaign called "Fight the Bite" and "Kick the Tick". The following are a few things you need to know and things you can do to protect yourself from insects that carry diseases.

Mosquitos bite most frequently in early morning and early evening hours. During the two hours after the sun sets is when mosquitos bite the most. If you go out at these times, wear long pants and long-sleeved shirts. Use insect repellent that contains DEET and put the repellent on your skin that is not covered by clothes. The DEET in the insect repellent keeps mosquitos from biting you.

Remember, mosquitos lay their eggs and grow in standing water. It only takes 7 days for a mosquito egg to hatch and become an adult mosquito. Empty water out of buckets, old tires, flowerpots and toys. It is also a good practice to change water every few days in pet bowls and bird baths. Keep good screens on all your home's windows and doors.

West Nile Virus (WNV) is an infectious disease spread by mosquito bites and first appeared in the United States in 1999. An abundance of dead birds may be a sign that West Nile Virus is in your area. Birds like crows, ravens, and blue jays get very sick and can die from West Nile. You do not get West Nile Virus from touching a dead bird. The most effective way to avoid West Nile Virus is to prevent mosquito bites.

Why should you be concerned about West Nile Virus? It can make you and your family sick. You can feel sick 3-15 days after a mosquito bites you. People who get sick may feel like they have the flu with symptoms such as fever, headaches, body aches, and rash. West Nile Virus is serious and can be deadly if left untreated.

The Zika Virus is also a threat and spread by mosquito bites. Zika carrying mosquitos bite people during the day. Zika mosquitos do not travel very far and usually stay within a quarter mile of where

they are born. Insect repellent containing DEET can also help prevent being bitten by a Zika mosquito.

About 1 in 5 people infected with Zika Virus become ill. The most common symptoms of Zika Virus are fever, rash, joint pain, or conjunctivitis (red eyes). Other common symptoms include muscle pain and headache. The illness is usually mild with symptoms lasting several days to a week. Severe disease requiring hospitalization due to Zika is uncommon and deaths are rare.

Currently, no vaccine or medications are available to prevent Zika infections. You can treat symptoms by getting plenty of rest and drinking fluids to prevent dehydration. Contact your health care provider before taking any medication associated with this infection.

Zika is primarily spread by mosquitos but is also sexually transmitted. Pregnant women with male sex partners who have lived in or traveled to an area with Zika Virus should either use a condom every time they have sex or not have sex during pregnancy. Zika can cause severe defects if a pregnant woman becomes infected.

Santa Rosa County Public Health Services Manager, Matthew Dobson, says, "It is forecasted to be a muggy and buggy summer. The best way to prevent the West Nile and Zika Viruses is to avoid mosquito bites. It can be difficult to avoid this in the Florida outdoor environment. We encourage people to do their best to defend themselves against mosquitos."

Another summer threat in the outdoor environment is tick-borne diseases. Lyme disease is caused by the bacterium *Borrelia burgdorferi* and is transmitted to humans through the bite of an infected blacklegged tick (commonly called the deer tick). Symptoms can include fever, headache, fatigue, and a characteristic bull's-eye shaped skin rash called erythema migrans.

Ticks are generally found near the ground in bushy or wooded areas. Ticks can't jump or fly. Instead, they climb tall grasses or shrubs and wait for a potential host to brush against them. When this happens, they climb onto the host and seek a skin site for attachment.

If a tick attaches itself to you, there is a proper way to remove it. Use fine-tipped tweezers to grasp the tick as close to the skin's surface as possible. Pull upward with steady, even pressure. Don't twist or jerk the tick. This can cause the tick's mouth parts to break off and remain in the skin. If this happens, remove the mouth parts with clean tweezers. After removing the tick, thoroughly clean the bite area and your hands with rubbing alcohol, an iodine scrub, or soap and water.

According to Dobson, the best prevention against tick bites is to wear insect repellent containing DEET, wear permethrin-treated clothing, treat family pets for ticks, check for ticks after activities in areas where ticks live, and shower soon after coming in from outdoors, wooded areas, or areas with tall grass or weeds.

"The community awareness campaigns the Santa Rosa County Health Department is promoting are called 'Fight the Bite' and 'Kick the Tick'. If you would like fliers or brochures for your business, faith-based organization, or institution, contact us and we will be happy to provide them," said Dobson.

For more information on tick-borne and mosquito-borne viruses, contact the Santa Rosa County Health Department at 850-564-2233 or visit the website at:

<http://santarosa.floridahealth.gov/programs-and-services/infectious-disease-services/arboviruses/index.html>

For information on how to control mosquitos near your home, contact Santa Rosa County Mosquito Control at 850-981-7135 or visit their website at: <https://www.santarosa.fl.gov/356/Mosquito-Control>

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